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ABSTRACT

An overview of assessment practices in the 107 California community colleges (CCCs) in 71 community college districts is presented. Nearly 1.4 million students are now enrolled in CCCs, and 40,000 full- and part-time faculty work in CCCs. The primary mission of CCCs is the provision of rigorous, high-quality lower division instruction for students who wish to obtain associate degrees, transfer to a 4-year institution, or prepare for an occupation. Changing demographic trends in the state have resulted in a large proportion of Black and Hispanic students enrolling in CCCs. Matriculation, academic standards, and accountability are discussed, including the assessment component of matriculation and the establishment of course prerequisites. Problems involved in implementation of policies on matriculation and academic standards receive special attention, as do student access and measurement of levels of success in CCCs. An institutional research and evaluation component of matriculation provides for both local and statewide evaluation of the program. CCCs are using a variety of measures to show the skill gains of students, their retention and persistence rates, their goal achievement success, and their satisfaction with the educational process. The changing demography, the raising of academic standards, and the lack of pre-college preparation of many students are also considered. (TJH)

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ASSESSMENT IN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Background

Faculty in the California Community Colleges have been assessing students since the first community college in California opened its doors in 1910. In the ensuing eight decades, Fresno Junior College became Fresno City College, its student body grew from 20 to nearly 16,000, and its faculty from 3 in 1910 to over 260 today.

During those same eighty years, the California Community Colleges have evolved into a statewide system of 107 institutions where now nearly 1.4 million students take advantage of the courses and student support services provided by more than 40,000 full- and part-time faculty. As could be expected - both here in California and across the country - the demand on community colleges for quality and accuracy in enrolling, assessing, placing, and evaluating students and their performance in college has also increased dramatically. Similarly, the demand on these two-year colleges to demonstrate student outcomes and institutional effectiveness has intensified.

Both the *1960 Master Plan for California Higher Education* and the *1987 Commission for the Review of the Master Plan* affirmed the Community Colleges as "open door" institutions. Community colleges do not "admit" students in the traditional sense. Rather, all individuals who are "18 or older and capable of profiting from the instruction offered" may enroll in a community college (*California Education Code*, Section 76000, 1981). This responsibility - to educate the citizenry of the state without "academic floors" or entrance requirements - sets community colleges apart from traditional colleges and universities.

The primary mission of the California Community Colleges as recommended by the recent Master Plan Commission is "the provision of rigorous, high quality lower division instruction for students who wish to obtain associate degrees, transfer to a four-year institution, or prepare for an occupation." The framers of the 1987 Master Plan also recognized the special responsibility of community colleges to provide basic skills or remedial courses as an essential part of the mission so that students would have access to transfer and career education courses through the pathway of basic skills courses, if they so needed.

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California's Changing Demography and Student Preparedness for College

Certainly, with regard to student preparedness to enter college in California, the need for a basic skills education is increasing. This need is evidenced by the large numbers of students who drop out of high school, by the many immigrant populations with literacy needs who continue to enter California at high rates, and by the native-born in this country who have not acquired the basic skills essential to success in the labor economy. The Achievement Council reports: "In 1987, while 17% of Asians and 27% of Whites dropped out [of high school], 45% of Latinos and 48% of Blacks dropped out." A recent report from the California Postsecondary Education Commission states that only 4.5 percent of all Black students and 5 percent of all Hispanic students of the 1986 graduating high school classes were eligible to attend the University of California. Only 13.3 percent of all Hispanic students and 10.8 percent of all Black students qualified for entrance to the state universities. These figures suggest that most Black and Hispanic students will attend a California community college - and they do.

Over 80 percent of all Hispanic and Black students in California higher education enter a community college. Another underrepresented group - the disabled - also enter higher education at the community college. More than 50,000 students with disabilities (over 95% of disabled students in California higher education) enroll in the community college.

Approximately 20% of Californians hold a bachelor's degree or higher. But, for every 1,000 White students who enter the ninth grade, only 56 will receive a bachelor's degree from a public university within 9 years. For Asians, 176 will receive a degree, for Blacks, 16, and for Hispanics, only 14.

In its reassessment of California Community Colleges, the Master Plan noted: "By the year 2000, ethnic minorities will account for more than 45 percent of the State's total population...In the twenty-five years since the [1960] Master Plan, as California's population has grown more diverse, the needs and expectations of the community college student pool have become more varied. This reflects in the large numbers of ethnic minorities, reentry women, non-English speaking immigrants, students unprepared for college-level work, handicapped, and working adults who now make up the majority of the enrollments in many Community Colleges."

A majority of California's students - especially those from underrepresented groups - are not prepared for college for a variety of reasons. Given the diversity of the student body, the variance in student preparedness for college, and the differences in course availability across these 107 institutions, enrolling students in courses in which they can succeed - and ensuring that they do - is a major charge to community colleges.

Matriculation, Academic Standards, and Accountability

At the same time, legislators and public policy makers in California have brought pressure to bear on community colleges - along with their university, state university, and K-12 partners - to demonstrate that they are accountable to the public for the education they provide. The public wants to know the skills gains of these students and their rates of retention, persistence, transfer, and

employment. These questions are asked in local communities and on a systemwide basis at the state level.

In the early 1980s, the community college State Board of Governors adopted policies designed to accomplish the goals of access and success for every student, as envisioned by the framers and reviewers of the Master Plan. To that end, the Board fostered the development of a coordinated system of services - now known as "matriculation." For students enrolled in credit courses, the Board also initiated policies to raise academic standards and the quality of community college courses leading to the associate degree and applicable to the baccalaureate degree.

Skepticism about the quality of community college courses, programs, and became increasingly evident among state policy makers and the public during the 1970s, especially following the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges adopted a resolution on the "matriculated student" and, in consultation with the Chancellor, called upon the Board of Governors to proceed with policies that would enhance academic standards and procedures, and improve the enrollment, retention, persistence, and goal attainment of community college students.

In response to this call for accountability, the Chancellor appointed a Task Force on Academic Quality in the spring of 1983, charged with the development of a model for matriculation. In July 1983, the Board received a report prepared by the task force on a preliminary matriculation model, to be tested initially in 1984-85. The model was further refined as a result of a comprehensive study of student matriculation processes at 16 community colleges, conducted in 1983-84. The task force also presented policy recommendations on remediation (precollegiate basic skills) and on standards for courses leading to the associate degree and applicable to the baccalaureate degree. Matriculation was developed as a program intended to go hand in hand with the provision of basic skills instruction and rigorous course standards necessary to ensure student access and success.

The matriculation program is made up of six coordinated components or services that help students clearly define and pursue their educational objectives: admissions, orientation, counseling and advisement, assessment, student follow-up, and evaluation.

In 1986, Assembly Bill 3, known as the Seymour-Campbell Matriculation Act, was passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor (Chapter 1467, Statutes of 1986). Subsequently, in January 1987, the Board adopted a specific plan for implementing matriculation, together with a plan for strengthening academic standards in the Community Colleges. *Student Matriculation: A Plan for Implementation* established a minimum set of standards for implementing the program at the local college level. *Proposals for Strengthening Academic Standards* provided a policy framework for relating matriculation to the curriculum.

Matriculation was first implemented on a systemwide basis in 1987-88. However, the State provided the colleges with only 20 percent of the program funding requested for that year. Despite this setback, the colleges were able to register significant accomplishments in the areas of orientation, assessment, and counseling. Sixty percent of the funding requested for matriculation was received in the second year, 1988-89. Matriculation is now in its third year as a systemwide

program and, for the first time, community colleges will receive the full amount of funding originally requested - $35.8 million for 1989-90.

The Assessment Component of Matriculation and the Establishment of Course Requisites and Prerequisites

In adopting *Student Matriculation: A Plan for Implementation* in January 1987, the Board of Governors established two policies critical to the development of the assessment component. With the passage of AB 3, these policies became minimum requirements for the 71 community college districts which comprise the 107 colleges.

* New (non-exempt) students enrolling into credit courses will be assessed for competencies in language and computational skills; assisted in identifying aptitudes, interests, and educational goals; evaluated for learning and study skills; and referred to specialized support services, and/or to supplemental assessments as determined by the college.

* Districts/colleges are expected to participate with the Chancellor's Office in an evaluation of assessment practices and instruments to ensure these are valid, reliable, sensitive to cultural and/or linguistic differences among students, and that assessment information is used for advisement, counseling, student follow-up, research, and accountability purposes.

In adopting *Proposals for Strengthening Academic Standards* at the same meeting, the Board established two other policies that complemented those for matriculation. The new policies were also designed as minimum requirements, in this case, to guide districts in raising academic standards, as follows:

Establishing Requisites for Entry-level Certificate and Degree Applicable Courses and for Levels of Pre-Collegiate Basic Skills Instruction

Community colleges shall establish minimum skill and/or competency requisites for enrollment in entry-level degree- and certificate-applicable courses and in courses at each level of the pre-collegiate basic skills curriculum. The skill and competency requisites shall be recommended by the faculty through the college and/or district curriculum committee, as defined in Title 5, Section 55002(a)(1), and approved by the local board. The requisites shall be based upon systematically derived evidence of a relationship between student assessment measures and students' performance in the course...A requisite may not be defined in such a way as to exclude a student from participation in a course on the basis of a single test score. Some courses may be exempted from having a reading, writing, computational, or critical thinking requisite if empirically derived evidence demonstrates that such skills are not necessary for successful performance in the course. Each college shall develop and submit to the Chancellor for approval a proposal for the course requisites it intends to establish, including evidence to document that all requirements of this policy statement have been adhered to.

Assuring Proper Placement and Equity for Students by Defining the Required Scope of Assessment

College assessment programs, established in relation to implementing matriculation, shall be the basis for establishing skill requisites for entry-level degree and certificate courses and basic skills instruction courses. Assessment programs shall be sufficiently comprehensive and valid to assure appropriate placement of students and also prohibit unlawful discrimination. Specifically, assessment programs shall include, at a minimum, measurements of student's language skills and computational skills; assistance in identifying aptitudes, interests, and educational goals; evaluation of learning and study skills; and referral to specialized support services. In addition, assessment programs shall provide for early identification of limited-English-speaking and disabled students for whom the regular assessment process may be inappropriate or result in misleading conclusions, and shall provide alternative or supplemental assessment processes suited to such students.

The Board directs the Chancellor to monitor the implementation of [this policy statement] by requiring that college matriculation plans include a comprehensive plan and procedures for an assessment program, including a description of the instruments and procedures to be used.

In addition, the Board directs the Chancellor to undertake a thorough review and analysis of districts' existing assessment policies, practices, and instruments in order to determine whether there is a need for or an advantage to establishing more consistent statewide policies and practices in these areas...

Implementing Policies on Matriculation and Academic Standards

These policy statements demonstrate that requirements for matriculation and for academic standards were, and continue to be, interrelated. As a result of these and other minimum requirements set forth in the two plans adopted by the Board in January 1987, local districts began to work toward full implementation of the program. Additional requirements addressed the other components of matriculation: admissions; orientation; advisement, counseling, and course selection; student follow-up; and institutional research and evaluation. Additional requirements for academic standards defined community college responsibilities for pre-collegiate basic skills instruction and adult basic education, and required upgrading and enforcement of standards for student progress and probation.

On November 7, 1988, community college Education Code regulations to strengthen the associate degree became effective as a result of the policies on academic standards adopted by the Board in January 1987. Today, concurrent with the implementation of matriculation, community colleges are engaged in an extensive reexamination of the curriculum and are upgrading courses, where necessary, to meet the new academic standards. In this process, community colleges are evaluating existing and establishing new skills requisites, prerequisites, and corequisites, when needed, relying on assessment information as a key source of data for placing students in appropriate college courses. The regulations to strengthen academic standards were designed to maintain access and to answer the increased calls for accountability by demonstrating the quality and rigor of community college courses.

Since that time, local districts have conducted numerous studies on the effectiveness of specific components of matriculation and on the validity of course requisites, prerequisites, and corequisites. A number of systemwide studies have also been completed on student outcomes in precollegiate basic skills and degree-applicable courses. Several major statewide student outcomes studies completed during the years 1986-1988 were conducted by the community college Learning Assessment Retention Consortium known as LARC. These studies showed that students who enter community college courses in remedial reading, writing, and mathematics, complete these courses and succeed to the next level of the curriculum. For example, 45% of the students who enrolled in remedial writing courses during the Fall 1986 had completed a Freshman composition course by Fall 1988. Over 80% of the former remedial reading and writing students persisted to the next semester, and students enrolled in increasingly larger proportions of college-level courses. These studies also found that community college students frequently change their goals during the first year of enrollment once they are introduced to the wide range of offerings.

In March 1989, the Board of Governors adopted *Matriculation: A Report on First-Year Implementation*, which was formally transmitted to the Legislature. The report stated that 91% of the colleges were making substantial progress in implementing the assessment component. Two of the report's seven key findings showed that "colleges have expanded the scope of their assessment activities, especially those related to redefining appropriate requisites and pre-requisites for credit courses, and that there is a greater need for basic skills courses and programs than was previously recognized."

At the State level, work on the assessment component of matriculation began in January 1988 when the Chancellor, in response to AB 3, established "an advisory committee to review and make recommendations concerning all assessment instruments used by districts and colleges" (AB 3, Chapter 1467, Statutes of 1986). Known as the Matriculation Assessment Advisory Panel [MAAP], this committee provided advice on the institutional, organizational, and structural changes needed to implement the assessment-related mandates of AB 3.

The advisory panel set out to accomplish four major charges: 1) develop standards for evaluating assessment instruments and procedures used to implement matriculation; 2) establish guidelines to operationalize those standards; 3) develop regulatory language to ensure accountability; and 4) provide leadership in the provision of faculty and staff inservice training in assessment.

During this period, MAAP prepared a draft of proposed regulations on assessment. After extensive consultation among community college constituencies, the regulations were finally adopted by the Board of Governors on September 14, 1989.

Student Access and Success in Community Colleges

Student assessment in the California Community Colleges is described by many as in a period of tremendous change, and, sometimes, turmoil. Some public policy makers are concerned that college placement tests may be used to deny students access to certain courses or to place them in programs they did not

intend to pursue. Litigation has been introduced, here and elsewhere, to address these important questions through the courts. Through the revised Master Plan for Higher Education, the State and the Board of Governors have strongly reaffirmed their committment to open access to community colleges and are especially alert to programs or procedures that might act as barriers to access, particularly for underrepresented students, 80% of whom enter higher education through the doors of California's community colleges.

The new matriculation regulations outline minimum standards for community colleges in the following areas: required matriculation services; assessment, research and evaluation; student rights and responsibilities; training and staff development; special accommodations, where appropriate for ethnic and language minority students and students with disabilities; and prerequisites and other limitations on enrollment. The provisions of these regulations go to the very heart of instruction and student services. They affect the ways in which students enroll into courses. They provide clear direction to the colleges on the development and implementation of precisely defined course requisites, prerequisites, and corequisites, and specifically address the proper use of skills assessment instruments. Finally, they establish procedures for college staff and students which are designed to accomplish the goals of student access and success through matriculation.

Because community colleges use diverse methods, procedures, and instruments (including tests) in the assessment, placement, and follow-up of students in courses and programs, the regulations have been designed to provide colleges with a comprehensive set of standards to guide them in implementing matriculation and in strengthening academic standards. These proposed regulations have been carefully crafted to ensure access, protect student rights, and prevent discriminatory practices, while at the same time, providing districts with the flexibility needed to fully implement all components of matriculation.

On the Horizon

Demonstrating accountability for a systemwide program which serves more than 1 million students annually is a great challenge for the community colleges. The institutional research and evaluation component of matriculation provides for both local and statewide evaluation of the program. Colleges are using a variety of measures to show the skills gains of students, their retention and persistence rates, whether or not they are progressing and achieving their goals, and student satisfaction with the process. At the state level, researchers are evaluating the extent to which colleges are achieving the Master Plan's goals of student access and success through matriculation. Reviewing local research, validation, and outcomes studies is a major activity which the State Chancellor's Office has undertaken in consultation with local community college faculty and administrative staff. The State has also provided fiscal support for this activity.

Student flow is another area which is being evaluated in a variety of ways as community colleges become networked through a new management information system which has been designed to gather comparable data elements on students, faculty, and institutional characteristics for state planning and policy making purposes. Among the top accountability priorities are the need to demonstrate the participation rates of students in courses, in programs, and between and among community colleges and universities - and with this

information, the need to evaluate the reasons for these differential rates. The success of community colleges in assisting students to attain their educational goals, especially students from underrepresented groups - will be continuously reviewed and evaluated by researchers and public policy makers as we enter the 21st century.

Classroom-based research is another activity which has come to the forefront in community colleges. The diverse learning styles of students must be coupled with effective teaching strategies for retention, persistence, and transfer purposes. California's Learning Assessment Retention Consortium [LARC] received a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education [FIPSE] to conduct classroom-based research at more than 20 community colleges for the next three years.

The State is supporting new intersegmental efforts among K-12, the community colleges, and the universities. In 1987, the Intersegmental Coordinating Council [ICC] was established to encourage cooperative efforts in four areas: student outreach and preparation, curriculum and assessment, the improvement of teaching, and transfer and articulation. Intersegmental committees of educators have been formed to identify effective intersegmental strategies in each of these areas and to evaluate the successes and failures of approaches and methods which have been used to improve the academic performance rates of students. One example of this effort is a recent publication Systemwide and Statewide Assessment in California which describes all of the student assessment-related activities within and across K-12, the community colleges, the state universities, and the University of California. Projects such as this provide a snapshot of the relationship between assessment and student flow through the educational pipeline in California and address issues of possible duplication of effort in the assessment of students. The California Community Colleges are an integral part of this effort and are already reaping the benefits of this collaboration from innovative projects such as Puente, the High Tech Centers for the Disabled, and the Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement [MESA] project, to name but a few which are designed to meet the educational needs of underrepresented students and which are expanding across the state to serve more students.

Conclusion

In the California Community Colleges, the purpose of assessment - whether it is student based, faculty based, or institutionally based - is to ensure student access and success. The changing demography of the state, the lack of preparation for college of many of California's students, the raising of academic standards, the introduction of matriculation, and accountability each play a significant part for community colleges in preparing an educated citizenry for this state.

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